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ABSTRACT

Issues that are basic to the present and future well being of 2-year colleges are discussed. These issues concern the need for 2-year colleges to rid themselves of their inferiority complex and to provide: broadened possibilities for curricular development; opportunity for helping people of all ages and background fulfill their educational needs; development of techniques for determining how best to serve particular constituencies; definitions of the purposes and objectives of the 2-year college; education of trustees about the nature and potentialities of 2-year colleges and their place in American education; information to constituencies about opportunities provided for general and specialized education; education of the American people about costs of education; further development of continuing education programs; the means to measure the outcomes of the educational process; and faculty orientation. (DB)

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# THE SURVIVAL OF THE TWO YEAR COLLEGE (!?!)

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Keynote Address

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# The Survival of the Two Year College (!?!)

by

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The theme of a recent workshop sponsored by the New England and Middle Atlantic Junior College Councils had an ominous sound--"The Survival of the Two Year College." Discussion group topics were similarly foreboding. I do not criticize the workshop planners, for they were merely reflecting the pervasive sense of gloom and doom currently afflicting the educational community. What is distressing is that the leadership of two year colleges should so quickly succumb to the malaise of their senior counterparts.

Two year colleges are not a new development in higher education, but the imposing proportions of the movement are relatively recent, and many are only in their first or second decade of existence. Junior and community colleges are a distinctively American phenomenon, and they hold the promise of educational fulfillment for vastly greater numbers of people than has ever been true before in our history. Indeed, such colleges are already making that promise a reality to thousands of younger and older people. That so much has been done in so short a time represents a notable accomplishment, and much of the credit belongs to people whose vision and commitment are second to none in the realm of higher education. The fact remains, however, that most two year colleges are still on the threshold of their future.

The privilege of being involved (in a small way) in the development of several such institutions has been for me both stimulating professionally and satisfying personally. In the course of this experience I came to believe deeply in the pertinence of two year colleges to America's educational needs and equally as firmly in their long range prospects. Perhaps, then, the

reader can understand my astonishment at being invited to keynote this workshop on "The Survival of the Two Year College." It may be that we have devised a new distinction between the optimist and the pessimist, with the optimist being one who believes in the future of the two year college, and the pessimist being concerned with its survival.

I would be an ostrich or worse if I did not acknowledge the precarious plight of some two year colleges, a plight they share with numerous four year institutions. The sad but simple truth is that a number of two year colleges should never have opened in the first place, founded as they were on pious and sentimental hopes which had no roots in reality. Rapid and rabbit-like multiplication of public two year colleges was usually justifiable, but still not very well conceived or planned. Even for the stronger private institutions the current phase in the evolution of publicly supported egalitarian educational opportunity is having its impact. And in the public sector the consequences of profligacy and building on sand are also readily apparent. Before the decade is out some of our neighbors, public as well as private, will no longer be with us. In education, too, it seems, we still have to learn by experience.

Nevertheless, let me say at the outset that I am an optimist with a sense of realism who prefers to think in terms of the future rather than merely in terms of survival. After all, the land iguana of the Galapagos Islands has survived since prehistoric time, but can anyone claim that civilization is the better for it? That there are many challenges and problems between us and the future is simply to stress the obvious, but what would life be without problems and challenges? Arnold Toynbee, the great British historian and philosopher, has argued persuasively that the success of great civilizations hinged directly on their responses to the challenges that confronted them.

I think it is fair to say that the preponderance of two year colleges have been so deeply engrossed by the immediate pressures of becoming established that until recently they have been unable to respond very vigorously to the challenges of influencing the development of postsecondary educational policy and priorities in the United States. The term post-secondary rather than higher education, incidentally, underscores the broad continuum of education beyond high school which I believe the two year colleges represent. The longer established private junior colleges were for a long time a small minority, and they were thereby too few and often too timid to assert themselves in the deliberations shaping the educational policies of the nation. On many campuses and in many forums, I have encouraged two year colleges to get rid of their inferiority complex, a kind of defensive posture which too often results in their standing on the sidelines while senior colleges and universities make or influence important decisions, decisions which determine national and statewide educational policies and allocation of financial resources in their support. Regardless of whether one thinks in terms of survival or the future of two year colleges, it is time to abandon the kind of inferiority complex which diminishes the rightful role they should be playing in guiding the nation's educational direction. Happily, I see evidence of change in this respect.

With the numbers of students who now receive their first postsecondary educational experience in two year colleges, the day when curricula and often the entire academic framework could be shaped by the dictates of senior colleges should be past. The fact is that senior colleges and universities are becoming increasingly dependent on the graduates of two year colleges to sustain their enrolments. Where there are extensive transfer and pre-professional programs, of course attention must be paid to the sequential

preparation of students who plan to continue in specialized areas. But there are vast opportunities still to be realized in developing courses and programs to captivate the intellect and imagination of all students and elevate them above the dulling experience which all too frequently high school has become. With the new-found popularity of vocational education, the possibilities of curricular development are even more vastly broadened, and there are virtually unlimited options for exercising initiative and creativity.

We hear a great deal these days about nontraditional education, and I would be certainly among the last to denigrate it. As a member of the recently established Council for the Progress of Nontraditional Study, under the chairmanship of Dr. Samuel Gould, I share with many others a deep-seated interest in opening up new avenues of educational opportunity to the American people. But it seems to me that we have been under-emphasizing one of the original manifestations of nontraditional approaches to postsecondary education, namely the two year colleges.

Among the criteria for defining nontraditional education we find programs of an unusual nature, departure from the traditional framework of age, sex, and ethnic backgrounds, a recognition of experience as a valid measure of qualification, and opportunities to move ahead at the individual student's own pace. One does not have to look very far to find that these criteria are not only met but often exceeded by many programs in two year colleges. Because of their proximity to greater numbers of people than ever had access to postsecondary educational institutions before, the two year colleges are in a unique position to capitalize on and further develop the current interest in nontraditional study. This is not to suggest that the future or the survival of two year colleges should focus only on

nontraditional study as a means of salvation. But I do believe that therein is a tremendous opportunity for helping people of all ages and backgrounds to fulfill their educational needs and aspirations. Many two year institutions are already providing this opportunity, and many can do much more.

Here, unfortunately, I must enter my first caveat. As one who has been involved in the evaluation of institutions for accreditation over a long period of time, I must emphasize the importance of each institution clearly and adequately defining its purpose and objectives. Too many postsecondary institutions are trying to be all things to all people, and in the process of diffusion they have either lost their distinction or failed to gain it. Many two year colleges have allowed their curricula to proliferate far too rapidly, showing little awareness of the fact that not every college can offer every kind of program with equal effectiveness. Two year colleges simply cannot spread themselves in every direction, and they must develop techniques for determining how best to serve their particular constituencies. I would place the problem of clearly and adequately defining the purposes and objectives of two year colleges as the first and foremost problem they face.

The sharpening and delimiting of purposes and objectives are essential prerequisites for the delineation of a clear framework within which to develop an institution's educational programs. How institutional objectives are arrived at, how they are reviewed, and how they are modified to meet changing circumstances pose serious problems for all institutions, and they are still not receiving the attention they deserve. One of the major reasons why so many of even our prestigious colleges and universities floundered so pitifully during the 'sixties was because they had no sense

of direction, because they had failed to define or affirm what they believed to be sound educational goals and values. Obvious as it may be, I am convinced that only when each institution has a clear understanding of its particular mission can it determine how best to serve its immediate environment as well as the larger interests of society.

Fundamental to the task of establishing well-defined purposes and objectives for each institution are the knowledge and sophistication of the people who comprise it. Again, whether one is concerned about the future or the survival of two year colleges, I would suggest that among the gravest difficulties facing all postsecondary institutions is that of finding people to serve on boards of trustees who are knowledgeable about education and the nature of an educational institution. All of us are guilty of making unwarranted assumptions, but it seems to me that among the most unwarranted is the assumption that an individual who readily accepts appointment to a board of trustees, whether politically or otherwise appointed, is ipso facto knowledgeable about the nature and functioning of an educational institution.

The advent of super-boards or state boards for public community colleges has complicated matters considerably, and then there is the imminent prospect of "1202 commissions" to be reckoned with by all postsecondary institutions. All of this simply underscores my point that we still have an enormous job to do to educate trustees about the nature and potentialities of two year colleges and their place in the scheme of American education. Where an institution has its own board of trustees, there should be <u>at a minimum</u> one annual retreat for board members to acquaint and reacquaint them with the purpose and objectives of the institution, its assets as well as its needs, and the prospects for the months immediately ahead. Occasions should

also be provided for interchange between members of the faculty and the student body with members of the board, not just to air grievances, but to share common interests and concerns. Unless we replace the often adversarial attitude between trustees and other members of the institution, not only do we foster the worst aspects of collective bargaining, but we fail to forge essential links of strength within the institution and between it and the community. Similar efforts must be undertaken to educate and involve the more remote members of state boards in the ongoing affairs of the institutions for which they are responsible.

One of the unhappy facts of life we have to live with is the lack of knowledge on the part of the public and, less forgiveable, other sections of the educational community about the nature and role of two year colleges in the framework of postsecondary education. High school teachers and counselors in some areas still suffer from the "prestige college syndrome" which means that they refer students to two year colleges only as a last resort, and often only the weaker students. At the other end of the line, faculty members and admissions committees in senior colleges and universities persist in outmoded attitudes toward two year colleges. The situation is changing, slowly, but if we are to become more generally accepted and respected, we must do a better job of informing our constituencies about the opportunities our institutions provide for general and specialized education. Despite all the lip service to state master plans for postsecondary education, they still fall far short of a rational and balanced program of public and private community and junior college development which relates and integrates these institutions directly to the other educational resources of their regions. Herein lies a challenge for vigorous and concerted action which we ignore only at our own peril.

Perhaps the most gigantic task for all of us concerned about education is that of educating the American people about its costs. For a society which basically still believes in education, we are miserly and mindless about giving it proper priority. If public institutions thought they would be in a better position than private junior colleges in the event of a financial crunch, the awakening has been jolting indeed. The impact of how much has been added to state and county budgets by the rapid proliferation of community colleges has registered, and the halcyon days when an institution could virtually write its own ticket are past. Unless the entire educational community unites effectively to convince the American people that nothing worthwhile is free, least of all education, we are all in for far more serious trouble than some of us are now experiencing.

It is still within our grasp to convince voters, legislators, and the citizenry at large that no investment promises greater returns than money spent judiciously to develop educational resources and opportunities. For a nation which finds billions to spend on missiles, moonshots, and massive sports arenas, there is obviously a way; our challenge is to create the will. Trustees must play a major leadership role in accepting their responsibility for meeting this challenge, and we professional educators must accept our responsibility for restating the rationale for the case in terms convincing enough to win it.

In one sense, many two year colleges are already making that case because of advantageous proximity to their constituencies. Not only have we moved educational opportunity geographically closer to people, but we have broadened its definition and are finally breaking down its compartmentalization within certain age brackets. As society realizes more and

more that education is important in our daily lives, regardless of age, the imagination and ingenuity of our responses to this growing awareness will do much to affect the permanence and stability of two year colleges. Of course it will always be a primary function of two year colleges to increase the educational qualifications of young people beyond the high school. At the same time, community service programs must also be an integral aspect of their function. Short courses on specialized subjects, workshops and seminars on community problems, and cooperative educational endeavors with business, labor, and governmental groups are but a few of the limitless possibilities. Simultaneously, the quality of our responses can foster and further public commitment to the essentiality of two year colleges.

Another dimension of the opportunities to be further developed in two year colleges is in the realm of continuing ecucation, formerly identified as extension or evening programs. The stereotype of part-time education as largely avocational is rapidly giving way to a more realistic concept of continuing education, one which has profound implications for the future. The number of people engaged in continuing and part-time education is already greater than those engaged full-time, and this trend will continue. I believe we must look primarily to two year colleges to provide refresher and renewal courses for business, government, and professional people - doctors, lawyers, engineers - and the whole gamut of specialists whose proficiency is so crucial to American society. Since it is usually impossible for these people to go to large universities or other centers of specialized knowledge, then that knowledge must be brought to them, and where better than at the two year colleges. In most cases such programs will require the importation

of certain types of specialists, perhaps in conjunction with local or regional professional associations, but the two year college can and ought to be the locus and coordinator of these activities.

The point is, quite bluntly, that we can no longer afford the kind of professionalism that stops learning when the last diploma is awarded or when the license is granted. The pace of scientific, technological, and sociological change today makes continuing education mandatory. Clearly then, two year colleges have obligations to their constituencies which far transcend the concept of cloistered education in an ivory tower. Many institutions are already responding to these and similar possibilities, and the expansion of these efforts in the years immediately ahead should enhance the appreciation of and the support for two year colleges.

Another way in which I believe we can strengthen the case for support is through the manner in which we present our story to the public. We are all too familiar with so-called prestigious colleges which base their reputation on the superior abilities of the students they admit. During the late 'fifties and throughout the 'sixties, other postsecondary institutions rested their case wholly on numbers, pointing to steadily rising enrollments as the entire justification for demanding and receiving adequate and even at times more than adequate financing. But now we find that selectivity in admissions is no longer touted as one institution after another lowers the minimum acceptable SAT score. Simultaneously, the other numbers game has also collapsed, and suddenly something is needed that is at once more substantial and more convincing if we are to regain and receive financial support.

Oddly enough, for all its long history, postsecondary education is still woefully short of data demonstrating its effectiveness. The American people are pragmatic by nature, and they like to see results. Quite simply, if we are to make a more acceptable case to the public, we must do a better job of measuring the outcomes of the educational process. There is little point in developing noble statements of purpose and objectives if we make no effort or devise no means for ascertaining their fulfillment. Fortunately, there is a good deal of work being done on this subject. The Federation of Regional Accrediting Commissions of Higher Education is currently engaged in a three-year study to develop more effective approaches to institutional self-study and evaluation focusing more specifically on educational outcomes. While there are serious misgivings about outcome measurement and even strong resistance in some quarters, we must do a better job of matching our performance with our promises or the case for public support of postsecondary education will be increasingly difficult to make.

The role of the faculty in all of this is obviously critical. There is simply no gainsaying the fact that a faculty which understands and is committed to the purpose and objectives of an institution makes all the difference in its success or failure. No exaggeration is necessary to underscore the gross dereliction of the nation's graduate schools in meeting their responsibilities for preparing faculty members for two year colleges. The consequent burden on developing two year colleges for recruiting and orienting teachers and counselors has been particularly heavy. Now, after years of struggling to scrape and hold together even a minimally qualified faculty, the recruitment scene has suddenly shifted to a buyer's market. Nevertheless, despite the larger pool of professionally trained talent to

draw from, few if any of the eager or anxious applicants have any real idea about what a two year college is or what it proposes to do for its constituents. The importance of faculty orientation, therefore, simply cannot be overstressed. A large part of that orientation must be in terms of educating traditionalists about the nontraditional and semitraditional purposes and objectives of two year colleges. Perceptions and predilections will have to change in the prospective faculty candidates emerging from the graduate universities. Among the attitudes to be cultivated is one in which teaching and learning are viewed as creative endeavors whose results must meet the test of pragmatism to the fullest extent possible. Collective bargaining and the failures of the graduate schools may be serious obstacles to the recruitment and orientation of a first-class faculty, but without one no institution can truly achieve excellence or deserve the committed support of its constituents.

Well, these are some thoughts triggered by the dolorous theme, "The Survival of the Two Year College." There are many other facets of the subject I would like to deal with, but time and space will not permit. The issues I have touched upon are basic to the present and future well-being of two year colleges. They vary in magnitude from campus to campus, in New England and the Middle Atlantic region as well as country wide, but none poses an insuperable obstacle to the long-range success of two year colleges.

If what I have written has a familiar ring, I hope it is not the kind of familiarity which breeds either contempt or complacency. There are problems and dilemmas and there are decisions to be made, but that is why we have administrators who are responsible for exercising the leadership required to cope with the challenges. To the extent we share a conviction

that two year colleges can make major contributions to postsecondary education, to the extent we are committed ourselves and can evoke similar commitment on the part of our colleagues and co-workers to the attainment of excellence in our programs and performance, to that extent will the stature and permanence of two year colleges be enhanced in the years immediately ahead. If you are a pessimist you see only the problems; if you are an optimist you are stimulated by the challenges and possibilities; and if you are a realist, you know there is a great deal of hard work ahead to secure more firmly the rightful place of two year colleges in America's postsecondary educational system.

(The above is based on an address to the 1974 Workshop sponsored in June by the New England and Middle Atlantic Junior College Councils at Mount Vernon College, Washington, D. C.)

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